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LOOKING AT "THE MESSAGE FOR TODAY"

"We, together with all the peoples of the world, are confronted with many crises in our lives as a result of these changing times. In the midst of these changes, we affirm the commandment of our Lord: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Our response to this commandment is to proclaim anew and afresh that this same Christ is indeed our Lord, our Peace and our Hope."

This is the preamble to the "The Message of Mission for Today," which is now being studied in draft form in each district of the Kyodan.

Entering the last stage of the 10 year plan of evangelism, which started in 1962, the Evangelism Committee realized the need to clarify the question of what the churches should proclaim today. That is, keeping in mind the statements on the Fundamental Policy of Mission and the Fundamental Theology of Mission, the committee should make concrete applications of the Kyodan's Confession of Faith to the problems of Japanese society and the world today.

Accordingly, the Evangelism Committee began to formulate the "Message," with the help of the Education Committee, the Social Action Committee and the Research Institute on the Mission of the Church. Under the new structure, the Commission on Mission of the Church assumed responsibility for bringing forth the draft.

The main body of the draft of the Message follows, with a summary of the points made in the accompanying Commentary, which seeks to clarify the historical and social situation of Japan and affirm the church's responsibility.

I.

Christ Is Our Lord

Through the redemptive death on the cross, this Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, is our Lord. The Lordship of Christ was manifest in the form of a servant. We confess Jesus Christ as one Lord, and the people who make this confession fight against the power of evil, bear the sufferings of their neighbors and serve in this world.

In considering the application of this in the light of contemporary events, reference is made to the defeat of the government based upon the divinity of the Emperor and the establishment of the new Constitution, which recognizes the sovereignty of the people, fundamental human rights and peaceful existence. The power of evil is seen at work in social systems and structures that enslave and ruin men. Japan is warned against parading superiority measured by economic growth whereas she should perform as a servant, seeking unity and peace.

II.

Christ Is Our Peace

Christ is our peace, for he has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14). The reconciliation of God in Christ is the foundation of peace in this world. Moreover, amid the conflicts of this world, we bear its burdens and live as messengers of reconciliation.

In regard to the current situation, the grounds of man's discord and hatred are identified as in man's attitudes of self-preservation and self-centeredness, which are the result of his loss of fellowship with God. Concrete expressions of efforts for peace are to be found in programs for protecting human rights, the pursuit of social justice and peace, and protecting human welfare.

The Japanese Constitution is seen as expressing a view of life and society that has its roots in the Biblical tradition, with the message, "Christ is our Peace" seen as the driving force to give concrete reality to the concepts in the Constitution. The peace article of the Japan Constitution is understood as a step toward world peace, as in Japan's cooperation with other countries to relieve the burdens of suffering peoples.

III.

Christ Is Our Hope

God our Father raised Christ from the dead and gave us an imperishable hope. Christ is the ground of our hope in this world. The event of the bodily resurrection of Christ completes this fact for all men: as it is written, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5), this is Christ's continuing work. Further, all those who partake of this hope overcome their nothingness and, led by Christ, participate in shaping history.

In interpreting "Christ as our Hope" in the context of today's world, the cross is seen as a source of judgment of mankind and society but also as a sign of assurance that God is present with men. As they participate in Christ's continuing work of "making all things new", when they are diligent in works of love, resisting the evils of financial power, violence or military might. Man, in the light of the New Jerusalem which God will create at the completion of history, is not to be viewed merely from the standpoint of economics, or occupation, or intellectual capacity, or status, or sex, or capacity to enjoy leisure, but as a personality who is beloved by God and an irreplaceable member of His community.

The districts will report their reactions to the Commission on Mission, which will submit the revised Message to the standing committee for its October meeting.

NATIONAL PASTORS' MEETING TO BE HELD IN SEPTEMBER

The Kyodan will hold its first national pastors' conference in twenty years, September 9-11, at the large Kowakien Inn in Hakone. An attendance of 1200-1500 is expected, and pastors have already expressed their desires on program, speakers and discussion topics.

General Secretary Toru Takakura expressed his hopes for the meeting in a recent issue of the Kyodan Times as follows: "First, I think it has considerable meaning from the point of view of 'getting together.' Only a small portion of pastors participate in the biennial General Assembly. Many voices have been calling for a large-scale meeting, the first in twenty years and the second since the end of the war."

"The Kyodan is in a process of change," he said, "due to restructuring, merger with the Okinawa Kyodan, etc. I think that having those who have served in the Kyodan up to now come together and once again gain a common awareness, as Kyodan pastors, will enable us to move ahead."

Selected as speakers, on the basis of responses to a post card questionnaire, are Rev. Masahisa Suzuki, moderator of the Kyodan and pastor of the Nishikatomachi Church, Tokyo, and Rev. Kikaku Shimamura, pastor, Fujimicho Church, Tokyo.

In the morning worship periods, the voices of pioneer pastors, working in areas of particular hardship and strain, will be heard.

As discussion subjects, the pastors put at the top of their preferences:

1. mission
2. church traditions
3. the work of the pastor
4. the church and society

Perhaps indicative of the times is the subject to be assigned to a panel: "Developing Dialogue." Pastors indicated their desire for more "dialogue," whether within the Kyodan, with society, or with church members.

"I suppose the problems will start as soon as the discussion moves to a deep level," Takakura said, "Nevertheless, I hope people from many different situations and 'fighting fronts,' including the Okinawa district, will talk face to face. Upon this depends the future solidarity of the pastors. This may become the 'core'."

The fall national pastors' conference was voted by the 15th General Assembly held in October 1968. In addition to 2,400 pastors, invitations to participate in full or observer status will be extended to other persons related to the church.

HALF OF DISTRICTS ELECT NEW MODERATORS

Reports from district assemblies, which have been held throughout Japan in the past several weeks, show that eight out of fifteen districts elected new moderators to serve the regular two-year term. (The other district, Kyoto, had to postpone its assembly when a group of seminarians interrupted it, objecting to what they claimed is a contradiction between criticism of the government bill to nationalize Yasukuni Shrine and support for plans for Expo '70. A part which they claim is of government strategy to divert attention from the 1970 Security Treaty issue.)

With the new men elected, the average age of district leaders comes down from 53.3 to 52.9 years. Two years ago, three moderators were in their 60s, seven in their 50s, and five in their 40s. Now the distribution is five in their 60s, four in their 50s, and six in their 40s, with two new moderators having just turned 40.

